

These koans come from Trevor Leggett's
The Warrior Koans : Early Zen in Japan

RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday evening 7:00 – 9:00 pm

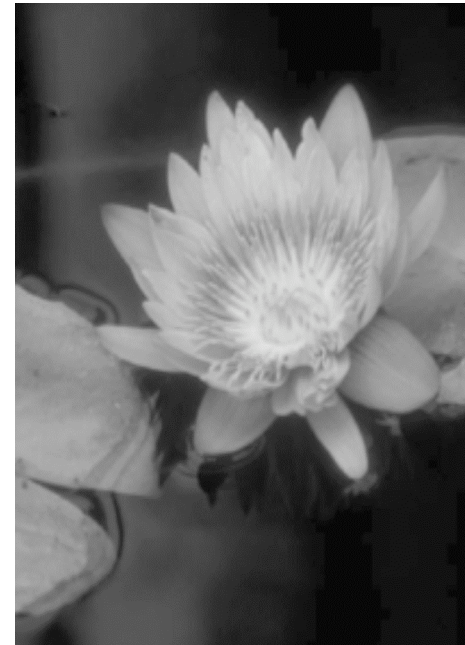
Saturday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Sunday 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Roots @

Blossoms

K O A N S



Vernal Equinox 2008

**Joan Sutherland
The Open Source**

Bukko, Teacher of the Nation, and asked, “What is Zen?”

Bukko replied, “The heart of the one who asks is Zen; it is not to be gotten from the words of someone else.”

The nun asked, “Then what are you doing, giving sermons that are written down?”

The teacher said, “To a deaf person, you show the moon by pointing; to a blind person, you show the gate by knocking on it with a tile.”

Just then one of the deer at a nearby stream gave a cry. The teacher asked, “Where is that deer?” The nun listened. The teacher gave a shout and asked, “Who is listening?”

At these words the nun had a flash of illumination and went out. At the water pipe from the stream she filled a lacquered wooden bucket used for flowers. As she was holding it, she saw the moon’s reflection in the water and made a poem, which was presented to Bukko:

The flower bucket took the stream water and held it,
And the reflection of the moon through pines lodged
there in purity.

Bukko glanced at it and said, “Nun, take the *Heart Sutra* and go.” After that she had interviews with the teacher, coming and being sent away. In the end her lacquer bucket broke, and she presented another poem of this realization:

Chance or design? The bottom fell out of my bucket;
Now it holds no water, nor does the moon lodge there.

After Chiyono’s death the nun Nyozen of Tokeiji used to meditate on this poem, and in 1313 she grasped the essence of Zen, presenting this poem to her teacher:

The bottom fell out of the bucket of that woman of
humble birth;
The pale moon of dawn is caught in the rain puddles.

Tests

1. What does the poem about water held in the bucket mean?
2. What is the bucket without a bottom?
3. What is the real meaning of Nyozen’s poem?
4. What phrases from the *Heart Sutra* fit the nuns’ poems? Say!

THE GATE BY WHICH ALL THE BUDDHAS COME INTO THE WORLD

Originally Enkakuji was forbidden to women except for unmarried nuns of the samurai class, if they could answer a question testing their realization. Here are some of the questions they were asked :

1. The gate has many thresholds, but even buddhas and ancestors cannot get through. If you want to enter, give the password.
2. This strong iron door can hardly be opened. Let someone of mighty power tear it off its hinges.
3. Vast, outstretched in all directions—no door, no gate. How will you recognize the entrance?

A nun from Tokeiji named Yoshibime and nicknamed Demon Girl wanted to enter Enkakuji to have dharma interviews.

When Demon Girl reached the door, the gatekeeper barred her way with a shout : “What is the gate through which the buddhas come into the world?”

Demon Girl grabbed his head and pushed it between her legs, saying, “Look, look!”

The monk said, “In the middle is a fragrance of wind and dew.”¹

Demon Girl said, “This monk! He’s not fit to keep the gate; he ought to be looking after the garden.”

The gatekeeper ran into the temple and reported this to the teacher’s attendant, who said, “Let’s go down and test this, and see if we can give a twist in there.” At the gate he asked Demon Girl the same question, “What is the gate through which the buddhas come into the world?”

She responded in the same way, grabbing his head and holding it between her legs, saying, “Look, look!”

The teacher’s attendant said, “The buddhas of the three worlds come, bearing light.”

¹ The fragrance in the middle refers to the experience of the Middle Way— not caught in the opposites of form and emptiness, being and nonbeing, etc.— though it has an obvious double meaning here

Demon Girl said, “This monk has the eye; he saw the 84,000 gates thrown open all at once.”²

Tests

1. What is the gate through which the buddhas come into the world?
2. What is this ‘fragrance of wind and dew’?
3. I don’t ask you about the buddhas of the three worlds bearing light, but how do *you* give light right now?



MYOTEI’S NIGHT INTERVIEW

Myotei was a 14th-century nun, well known for her strength of character, who trained at Enkakujī. This story takes place during a robatsu retreat, the most strenuous training period of the year, when the participants meditated through the night and got very little sleep. This koan was subsequently taken up by nuns in the whole eastern part of Japan.

Before one of the night interviews with her teacher Kimon, Myotei took off her robes and came in completely naked. She lay down in front of her teacher, who picked up his iron ceremonial stick and thrust it toward her thighs, asking, “What trick is this?”

Myotei said, “I present the gate by which all the buddhas of the three realms come into the world.”

The teacher said, “Unless the buddhas of the three realms go in, they cannot come out. Let the gate he entered here and now,” and he sat astride Myotei.

She demanded, “You who wants to enter, what buddha are you?”

The teacher said, “What is to be from the beginning has no ‘wants’ about it.”

Myotei said, “You who do not give your name are a barbarian pirate and not allowed to enter.”

The teacher said, “Maitreya Buddha, who has to be born to save the people after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha, enters the gate.”

Myotei started to speak but Kimon immediately covered her mouth. He pressed his iron stick between her thighs, saying, “Maitreya Buddha enters the gate. Give birth this instant!”

Myotei hesitated and the teacher said, “This is no true womb; how could this give birth to Maitreya?”

Myotei left and at the interview the next morning her teacher asked, “Have you given birth to Maitreya?”

She cried with great force, “He was born quietly last night.” She caught hold of Kimon and put her hands around his head, saying, “I invite Maitreya to consider the top of this head the Lion Throne and preach a sermon from it.”

Kimon said, “The way is one alone—not two, not three.”

Myotei said, “In their abilities, sentient beings differ in a million ways. How can you stick to just one way?”

Kimon said, “One general at the head of ten thousand soldiers enters the capital.”

Tests

1. What is the meaning of Myotei’s coming naked for her night interview?
2. She hesitated about giving birth to Maitreya. Say something for her.
3. What does the one general and the ten thousand soldiers mean? What is it directly? Now say!



MUJAKU’S BOTTOMLESS BUCKET

This is the enlightenment story of a 13th century woman who trained at Tokeiji. Her teacher Bukko, one of the Chan pioneers in Japan, later gave her transmission and she became a teacher. This story and its poems were taken up by later generations of students at both Tokeiji and Enkakujī.

The nun Mujaku had been a laywoman named Chiyono who was widowed at 34 and couldn’t get over her grief. She came to

² The 84,000 gates refer to the pores of the skin